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Yvonne Devereux
Headteacher
St Paul's Catholic Primary School
Park Lane
Cheshunt
EN7 6LR

Dear Mrs Devereux

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Paul's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors to discuss the actions being taken to improve the school. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority. A meeting was also held with a group of Year 6 pupils. I scrutinised a range of documents and you joined me on brief visits to all classes.

Context

Two members of staff will leave at the end of the summer term 2013. Four new teachers will start at the school in September 2013, including three newly qualified teachers.

Main findings

You, other senior leaders and the governing body members are providing ambitious direction for the school's improvement. You all have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You are tackling weaknesses determinedly, resulting in clear improvements. There is now no inadequate teaching and there is an improvement in the proportion of good teaching. Teachers receive accurate feedback after lesson observations carried out by leaders and they follow up quickly on points for improvement. Strengths found at the last inspection are being sustained, for example in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and being developed further.

You have explained to teachers what is expected of them and the rate at which they are expected to improve. Teachers and support staff have a clearer understanding about what counts as good progress in reading, writing and mathematics because of training they have received, including individual support for some teachers. You have also raised the ambition and skills of teaching assistants through effective coaching and have made sure that they also have robust performance management.

Systems for checking how well pupils are progressing are established well and are supporting improvements in pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Across the school, there is a sharper focus on improving pupils' use of correct grammar and punctuation. The quality of consistent marking is better than that seen at the last inspection. There are more opportunities for pupils to investigate and solve problems in mathematics. Pupils I spoke to confirmed that teachers have raised their expectations about the quality and quantity of work produced by pupils. The displays of pupils' work and other stimulating resources around the school, and in classes, also reflect leaders' and teachers' raised expectations and support pupils' learning well. Teachers are making constructive use of what they learned about pupils' work from their visit to an effective school because of clear guidance they received prior to their visit and checks carried out by senior leaders in lessons after the visit.

Governors are very keen to secure improvements to teaching and learning quickly. They use their visits to lessons, accompanied by senior leaders, to develop their understanding of effective teaching and learning. Their grasp of pupils' performance data is secure and enables them to ask sharp questions about the impact of actions being taken to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school improvement plan clearly deals with all of the areas identified in the last inspection. There are suitable, measurable success criteria to help check how teaching and learning are improving against challenging targets. However, the plan does not refer clearly enough to how much progress more-able pupils should be making in each year group. Senior leaders and governors are aware that staff changes in the autumn term 2013 present opportunities for rapid improvement, as well as potential risks.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- make sure that the appointment of new qualified teachers from September this year continues to contribute to the pace of improvements in teaching and pupils' progress
- include in the school improvement plan how much progress more-able pupils are expected to make in reading, writing and mathematics in each year group; this should help leaders and governors to measure the success of teachers' work.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority's improvement partner for the school has carried out lesson observations and reviewed pupils' performance data. The headteacher has found this helpful. Local authority advisers have agreed levels of support from the start of the new academic year, for example in English and mathematics, and for supporting newly qualified teachers. The link with an effective school is proving useful in helping teachers to raise their expectations about the quality and quantity of work done by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire, and the Archdiocese of Westminster.

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector